

Opening Remarks of

His Excellency Bishop Paul D. Tighe

Innovation and Protection: towards environmental challenges

I am very happy on behalf of the Holy See, and in the name of the President of the Pontifical Council for Culture, Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, to welcome you all to our National Day on the occasion of the International Horticultural Exhibition 2019 in Beijing.

In particular, I would like to welcome and acknowledge the presence of the representatives of the Exhibition Organizers: Mr. ZHANG Lannian, Beijing Expo Chief Engineer, Mr. XIE Yunliang, Senior Diplomatic Advisor, Mr. JIAO Yutong, Ms. LIU Yang, Ms. HU Xiaoxi Aurora.

I wish to register also the gratitude of the Holy See for the invitation that the Chinese Government extended to us through their diplomatic representatives at the United Nations to be part of this great event.

This sign of openness and welcome is much appreciated and our time here has helped us to grow in understanding of your culture and traditions. I would also like also to extend to our hosts every best wish at this time of the mid-autumn festival.

I extend also a warm welcome to the diplomatic representatives and to our colleagues from other Pavilions, to the Catholic representatives as well as to the Chinese professors, students and visitors who are with us today.

The Holy See is very appreciative of the opportunity offered by our presence at this Exhibition to demonstrate our concern to alert the global community to the risks associated with climate change and environmental degradation. Pope Francis has made this a central issue in his teaching and mission, in particular in his encyclical letter *Laudato Si*, of which you will hear more from our speakers. In fact, the aim of our presence here is cultural. Through the materials exhibited we wish to show that we share your concerns about the environmental challenges facing our world, our shared home, and that we are pleased to contribute to the aim of this Exhibition to raise awareness about the state of the earth.

Our presence here will come as no surprise to anyone who is familiar with the history of the Church in general and of our monastic tradition in particular. One of the most prominent features of traditional monasteries was the presence of a garden or a cloister. These gardens served many purposes; as places where food was cultivated they provided for the material needs of the monks, many focused on the medicinal benefits of the plants and herbs that were grown, the gardens became spaces not just of utility but of beauty where flowers and plants were presented and arranged so as to lift the spirits of those who frequented them, they became places where communities gathered and shared their ideas,

they also served as important places of work where monks learned the value of manual labour and of working close to the earth.

Gardens, and horticulture in general, continue to serve these purposes. We learn to respect the fruitfulness of our earth and to grow in appreciation of the abundance of the soil and our eco-systems but also of their fragility.

“Although we are often not aware of it, we depend on these larger systems for our own existence. We need only recall how ecosystems interact in dispersing carbon dioxide, purifying water, controlling illnesses and epidemics, forming soil, breaking down waste, and in many other ways which we overlook or simply do not know about. Once they become conscious of this, many people realize that we live and act on the basis of a reality which has previously been given to us, which precedes our existence and our abilities. So, when we speak of “sustainable use”, consideration must always be given to each ecosystem’s regenerative ability in its different areas and aspects.” (*Laudato Si*, 140).

Scientists have a significant role to play in helping us to appreciate the complexity of our natural environments and our need to live in harmony with the natural rhythms and cycles of nature.

“Given the complexity of the ecological crisis and its multiple causes, we need to realize that the solutions will not emerge from just one way of interpreting and transforming reality. Respect must also be shown for the various cultural riches of different peoples, their art and poetry, their interior life and spirituality. If we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out and that includes religion and the language particular to it.” (*Laudato Si*, 63).

Gardens can still be privileged places of learning in the deepest sense. We remember how the schools of Greek philosophy, the academies, were often located in gardens which nourished the sensitivity and recollection necessary for higher thought. Working close to the earth (humus) helped the monks to learn humility, to be grounded and rooted in reality, and to grow in a sense of their humanity. The monastery gardens were also places of scientific learning – we should not forget that Gregor Mendel’s attentiveness in observing the reproduction of pea plants in his monastery garden opened the way to the science of genetics.

Perhaps today, more than ever, we need to cultivate gardens as places not just of utility but of beauty where people learn to appreciate, and be grateful for, the wonders of nature.

“The relationship between a good aesthetic education and the maintenance of a healthy environment cannot be overlooked. By learning to see and appreciate beauty, we learn to reject self-interested pragmatism. If someone has not learned to stop and admire something beautiful, we should not be surprised if he or she treats everything as an object to be used and abused without scruple...Our efforts at education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature.” (*Laudato Si*, 215).

I have focussed on gardens in the Christian monastic tradition because it is the tradition with which I am most familiar but the significance of gardens as places of grace is to be found in all the great religious and philosophical traditions. In fact, one of the great parables that invites us to a greater environmental awareness comes from the Arabic tradition: In the beginning the world was a garden

full of flowers and plants. God, as he created men and women, said to them, “Every time you do something bad, I will cause a grain of sand to fall onto the earth.” This warning was not taken seriously, “What difference would a hundred or even thousands of grain of sand make to such an enormous garden?” The years passed and sins multiplied, torrents of sand fell on the earth. Thus were born the deserts which continue to grow. God continues to warn us not to reduce his fruitful garden into an enormous desert. It is not only religious traditions that value nature. The abiding presence of gardens and public parks in our cities testifies to humanity’s need for places of beauty, rest, play and assembly.

The nurturing of a garden, and especially the planting of a tree, is essentially a gesture of hope in the future of humanity and of our world. It indicates a commitment to leave the world in good condition for future generations. My father was a gifted gardener, he had the mythical green fingers. Before he died, he established gardens and green spaces in the homes of each of his children. These gardens, and especially his favourite flowers and plants, continue to speak to his grandchildren and encourage them to love nature – they are in a sense a gift for posterity. The great Irish poet, Seamus Heaney, explored the depths of this tradition in a poem he wrote as he watched his elderly father dig a garden for him in his newly acquired home. Please indulge me:

Digging

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
Bends low, comes up twenty years away
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
To scatter new potatoes that we picked,
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner’s bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to right away

Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, going down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.

Thus was born the poet's call to dig deeper, to go down below the surface to find the "good turf." I hope this Exhibition which brings together peoples of so many different traditions and cultures to reflect on our shared relationship to the earth and to nature will encourage us to dialogue, to go deeper, in our efforts to learn about each other and to grow in mutual appreciation of our insights and wisdom. While growing in knowledge of the surface differences between our customs and practises, the rich variety that gives colour and texture to our world, let us learn to work together for the good of all and for our shared home.

In doing so, we will be faithful to the theme of this Exhibition, *Live Green, Live Better*. This commitment explains the title of the Holy See's Pavilion, Home of Hearts. The liveable environment and spiritual homeland dreamed by the mankind.

In our Pavilion, we have endeavoured to express this in symbols, artefacts and ideas. As in the medieval cloisters, we play with water and with light, symbols which so powerfully express possibilities of growth and new life. The presence of a reproduction of Johan Wenzel Peter's painting of the Garden of Eden offers us an artistic expression of the beauty and harmony of nature. The Manuscripts from the Apostolic Library are there to remind us of the healing qualities of nature, something that is even more appreciated in the eastern tradition. The demonstration of the power of light to enhance the growth of plants is there to remind us how much science has to contribution to our understanding of nature and the potential to put technology at the service of human well-being.

After this event and the refreshment, all of you are invited to visit our Pavilion where you can see for yourselves what we attempting to communicate. We have also prepared a Workshop for children, that will take place this afternoon with a view to teaching them how to appreciate nature through art. This workshop aims will show them how to express and draw nature and the differences between living and non-living objects. Children will have the opportunity to draw and we will also invite all children to participate in our "Forgotten Bird" colouring competition.

In this moment I would like to thank all those who committed themselves to make this Pavilion as it is: the Vatican Museums and the Apostolic Library; the Staff of Custom Office of the Vatican City State; Architect Guido Rainaldi, who designed the first project; the BOTW Team who constructed it; Mr. Ferdinando Latour, who facilitated the installation of an olive tree which is over 400 years old and made a copy of Wenzel Peter's painting, while also preparing the gifts you will receive

today; Architect Giuseppe Dinicola who introduced some important improvements and is in charge of technical maintenance; Ellipz Smart Solutions for sharing and presenting innovative technologies; the Fundação Ilidio Pinho and the Science and Faith – STOQ Foundation that supported us in this effort.

Furthermore, I would like to express our thanks to the diplomatic representatives of the Netherland as well as to the staff of their pavilion for the support they offered. I wish to address our words of gratitude for friendship, advice and help to His Excellency the Ambassador Ettore Sequi and his collaborators from Italian Embassy.

Also a special thanks to Dr. Anna Kurdziel for constant coordination of all procedures, Prof. Chiaretto Yan and Ms. Paola Tai together with our guides and volunteers for managing our Pavilion and to some benefactors who want to remain anonymous.

I would like to express a particular word of thanks on my own behalf and on behalf of Cardinal Ravasi to Mons. Trafny for the competence, determination and creativity he has shown in bring this project to completion. I would finally like to express the gratitude of the Council for Culture to the Holy Father and the Holy See for the constant support they have offered to this initiative – this support witnesses to the commitment to strengthening the relationship of peace and friendship between the Holy See and China.